

# **On the History of the Communist League**

**Friedrich Engels**



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By Friedrich Engels, 1885

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With the sentence of the Cologne Communists in 1852, the curtain falls on the first period of the independent German workers' movement. Today this period is almost forgotten.<sup>[1](#)</sup> Yet it lasted from 1836 to 1852 and, with the spread of German workers abroad, the movement developed in almost all civilized countries. Nor is that all. The present-day international workers' movement is in substance a direct continuation of the German workers' movement of that time, which was the *first international workers' movement* of all time, and which brought forth many of those who took the leading role in the International Working Men's Association. And the theoretical principles that the Communist League had inscribed on its banner in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1847 constitute today the strongest international bond of

the entire proletarian movement of both Europe and America.

Up to now there has been only one source for a coherent history of that movement. This is the so-called Black Book, *The Communist Conspiracies of the Nineteenth Century*, by Wermuth and Stieber, Berlin, two parts, 1853 and 1854. This crude compilation, which bristles with deliberate falsifications, fabricated by two of the most contemptible police scoundrels of our century, today still serves as the final source for all non-communist writings about that period.

What I am able to give here is only a sketch, and even this only in so far as the League itself is concerned; only what is absolutely necessary to understand the *Revelations*. I hope that some day I shall have the opportunity to work up the rich material collected by Marx and myself on the history of that glorious period of the youth of the international workers' movement.

In 1836 the most extreme, chiefly proletarian elements of the secret democratic-republican Outlaws' League, which was founded by German refugees in Paris in 1834, split off and formed the new secret League of the Just. The parent League, in which only sleepy-headed elements à la Jakobus Venedey were left, soon fell asleep altogether; when in 1840 the police scented out a few sections in Germany, it was hardly a shadow of its former self. The new League, on the contrary, developed comparatively rapidly. Originally it was a German outlier of the French worker-communism, reminiscent of Babouvism<sup>2</sup> and taking shape in Paris at about this time; community of goods was demanded as the necessary consequence of "equality". The aims were those of the Parisian secret societies of the time: half propaganda association, half conspiracy, Paris, however, being always

regarded as the focus of revolutionary action, although the preparation of occasional *putsches* in Germany was by no means excluded. But as Paris remained the decisive battleground, the League was at that time actually not much more than the German branch of the French secret societies, especially the *Société des saisons* (tr. Society of the Seasons, French secret society, 1837-39—*Ed.*), led by Blanqui and Barbès, with which a close connections was maintained. The French went into action on May 12, 1839; the sections of the League marched with them and were thus embroiled in the common defeat.

Among the Germans arrested were Karl Schapper and Heinrich Bauer; Louis Philippe's government contented itself with deporting them after a fairly long imprisonment. Both went to London. Schapper came from Weilburg in Nassau and while a student of forestry at Giessen in 1832 was a member of the conspiracy organized by Georg Büchner; he took part in the storming of the Frankfort constable station on April 3, 1833, escaped abroad and in February 1834 joined Mazzini's march on Savoy. Of gigantic stature, resolute and energetic, always ready to risk civil existence and life, he was a model of the professional revolutionary that played an important role in the thirties. In spite of a certain sluggishness of thought, he was by no means incapable of profound theoretical understanding, as is proved by his development from "demagogue" to Communist, and he held then all the more rigidly to what he had once come to recognize. Precisely on that account his revolutionary passion sometimes got the better of understanding, but he always afterwards realized his mistake and openly acknowledged it. He was a real man and what he did for the founding of the German workers' movement will not be forgotten.

Heinrich Bauer, from Franconia, was a shoemaker; a lively, alert, witty little fellow, whose little body, however, also contained much shrewdness and determination.

Bauer arrived in London, where Schapper, who had been a compositor in Paris, now tried to earn his living as a language teacher, they both set to work gathering up the broken threads and made London the centre of the League. They were joined here, if not already earlier in Paris, by Joseph Moll, a watchmaker from Cologne, a medium-sized Hercules—how often did Schapper and he victoriously defend the entrance to a hall against hundreds of onrushing opponents!—a man who was at least the equal of his two comrades in energy and determination, and intellectually superior to both of them. Not only was he a born diplomat, as the success of his numerous trips on various mission proved; he was also more capable of theoretical insight. I came to know all three of them in London in 1843. There were the first revolutionary proletarians whom I met, and however far apart our views were at that time—for I still owned, as against their narrow-minded equalitarian Communism<sup>3</sup>, a goodly dose of just as narrow-minded philosophical arrogance—I shall never forget the deep impression that these three real men made upon me, who was then still only wanting to become a man.

In London, as in a lesser degree in Switzerland, they had the benefit of freedoms of association and assembly. As early as February 7, 1840, the legally functioning German Workers' Educational Association, which still exists, was founded. This Association served the League as a recruiting ground for new members, and since, as always, the Communists were the most active and intelligent members of the Association, it was a matter of course that its leadership lay entirely in the hands of the League. The League soon had several communities, or, as they were then still called, "lodges", in

London. The same obvious tactics were followed in Switzerland and elsewhere. Where workers' associations could be founded, they were utilized in like manner. Where this was forbidden by law, one joined choral societies, athletic clubs, and the like. Connections were to a large extent maintained by members who were continually traveling back and forth; they also, when required, served as emissaries. In both respects the League obtained lively support through the wisdom of the governments which, by resorting to deportation, converted any objectionable worker—and in nine cases out of ten he was a member of the League—into an emissary.

The extent to which the restored League was spread was considerable. Notably in Switzerland, Weitling, August Becker (a highly gifted man who, however, like so many Germans, came to grief because of innate instability of character) and others created a strong organization more or less pledged to Weitling's communist system. This is not the place to criticize the communism of Weitling. But as regards its significance as the first independent theoretical stirring of the German proletariat, I still today subscribe to Marx's words in the Paris *Vorwärts* of 1844:

"Where could the (German) bourgeoisie—including its philosophers and learned scribes—point to a work relating to the emancipation of the bourgeoisie—its political emancipation—comparable to Weitlings' *Guarantees of Harmony and Freedom*? If one compares the drab mealy-mouthed mediocrity of German political literature with this immeasurable and brilliant debut of the German workers, if one compares these gigantic children's shoes of the proletariat with the dwarf proportions of the worn-out political shows of the bourgeoisie, one must prophesy an athlete's figure for this Cinderella."

This athlete's figure confronts us today, although still far from being fully grown.

Numerous sections existed also in Germany; in the nature of things they were of a transient character, but those coming into existence more than made up for those passing away. Only after seven years, at the end of 1846, did the police discover traces of the League in Berlin (Mentel) and Magdeburg (Beck), without being in a position to follow them further.

In Paris, Weitling, who was still there in 1840, likewise gathered the scattered elements together again before he left for Switzerland.

The tailors formed the central force of the League. German tailors were everywhere: in Switzerland, in London, in Paris. In the last-named city, German was so much the prevailing tongue in this trade that I was acquainted there in 1846 with a Norwegian tailor who had travelled directly by sea from Trondhjem to France and in the space of eighteen months had learned hardly a word of French but had acquired an excellent knowledge of German. Two of the Paris communities in 1847 consisted predominantly of tailors, one of cabinet makers.

After the centre of gravity had shifted from Paris to London, a new feature grew conspicuous: from being German, the League gradually became *international*. In the Workers' Society there were to be found, besides German and Swiss, also members of all those nationalities for whom German served as the chief means of communication with foreigners, notably, therefore, Scandinavians, Dutch, Hungarians, Czechs, Southern Slavs, and also Russians and Alsatians. In 1847 the regular attendants included a British grenadier of the Guards in uniform. The society soon called itself the



*Communist Workers' Educational Association*, and the membership cards bore the inscription "All Men Are Brothers", in at least twenty languages, though not without mistakes here and there. Like the open Association, so also the secret League soon took on a more international character; at first in a restricted sense, practically through the varied nationalities of its members, theoretically through the realization that any revolution, to be victorious, must be a European one. One did not go any further as yet; but the foundations were there.

Close connections were maintained with the French revolutionists through the London refugees, comrades-in-arms of May 12, 1839. Similarly with the more radical Poles. The official Polish *émigrés*, as also Mazzini, were, of course, opponents rather than allies. The English Chartists, on account of the specific English character of their movement, were disregarded as not revolutionary. The London leaders of the League came in touch with them only later, through me.

In other ways, too, the character of the League had altered with events. Although Paris was still—and at that time quite rightly—looked upon as the mother city of the revolution, it had nevertheless emerged from the state of dependence on the Paris conspirators. The spread of the League raised its self-consciousness. It was felt that roots were being struck more and more in the German working class and that these German workers were historically called upon to be the standard-bearers of the workers of the North and East of Europe. In Weitling was to be found a communist theoretician who could be boldly placed at the side of his contemporary French rivals. Finally, the experience of May 12th had taught us that for the time being there was nothing to be gained by attempts at *putsches*. And if one still continued to explain every event as a sign of the approaching storm, if one still preserved intact the old, semi-

conspiratorial rules, that was mainly the fault of the old revolutionary defiance, which had already begun to collide with the sounder views that were gaining headway.

However, the social doctrine of the League, indefinite as it was, contained a very great defect, but one that had its roots in the conditions themselves. The members, in so far as they were workers at all, were almost exclusively artisans. Even in the big metropolises, the man who exploited them was usually only a small master. The exploitation of tailoring on a large scale, what is now called the manufacture of ready-made clothes, by the conversion of handicraft tailoring into a domestic industry working for a big capitalist, was at that time even in London only just making its appearance. On the one hand, the exploiter of these artisans was a small master; on the other hand, they all hoped ultimately to become small masters themselves. In addition, a mass of inherited guild notions still clung to the German artisan at that time. The greatest honor is due to them, in that they, who were themselves not yet full proletarians but only an appendage of the petty bourgeoisie, an appendage which was passing into the modern proletariat and which did not yet stand in direct opposition to the bourgeoisie, that is, to big capital—in that these artisans were capable of instinctively anticipating their future development and of constituting themselves, even if not yet with full consciousness, as the party of the proletariat. But it was also inevitable that their old handicraft prejudices should be a stumbling block to them at every moment, whenever it was a question of criticizing existing society in detail, that is, of investigating economic facts. And I do not believe there was a single man in the whole League at that time who had ever read a book on political economy. But that mattered little; for the time being “equality”, “brotherhood” and “justice” helped them to surmount every theoretical obstacle.

Meanwhile a second, essentially different communism was developed alongside that of the League and of Weitling. While I was in Manchester, it was tangibly brought home to me that the economic facts, which have so far played no role or only a contemptible one in the writing of history, are, at least in the modern world, a decisive historical force; that they form the basis of the origination of the present-day class antagonisms; that these class antagonisms, in the countries where they have become fully developed, thanks to large-scale industry, hence especially in England, are in their turn the basis of the formation of political parties, party struggles, and thus of all political history. Marx had not only arrived at the same view, but had already, in the *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844), generalized it to the effect that, speaking generally, it is not the state which conditions and regulates the civil society at all, but civil society which conditions and regulates the state, and, consequently, that policy and its history are to be explained from the economic relations and their development, and not vice versa. When I visited Marx in Paris in the summer of 1844, our complete agreement in all theoretical fields became evident and our joint work dates from that time. When, in the spring of 1845, we met again in Brussels, Marx had already fully developed his materialist theory of history in its main features from the above-mentioned basis and we now applied ourselves to the detailed elaboration of the newly-won outlook in the most varied directions.

This discovery, which revolutionized the science of history and, as we have seen, is essentially the work of Marx—a discovery in which I can claim for myself only a very insignificant share—was, however, of immediate importance for the contemporary workers' movement. Communism among the French and Germans, Chartism among the English, now no longer appeared as something accidental which could just as well not have occurred. These

movements now presented themselves as a movement of the modern oppressed class, the proletariat, as the more or less developed forms of its historically necessary struggle against the ruling class, the bourgeoisie; as forms of the class struggle, but distinguished from all earlier class struggles by this one thing, that the present-day oppressed class, the proletariat, cannot achieve its emancipation without at the same time emancipating society as a whole from division into classes and, therefore, from class struggles. And communism now no longer meant the concoction, by means of the imagination, of an ideal society as perfect as possible, but insight into the nature, the conditions, and the consequent general aims of the struggle waged by the proletariat.

Now, we were by no means of the opinion that the new scientific results should be confided in large tomes exclusively to the “learned” world. Quite the contrary. We were both of us already deeply involved in the political movement, and possessed a certain following in the educated world, especially of Western Germany, and abundant contact with the organized proletariat. It was our duty to provide a scientific foundation for our view, but it was equally important for us to win over the European, and in the first place the German, proletariat to our conviction. As soon as we had become clear in our own minds, we set about the task. We founded a German workers’ society in Brussels and took over the *Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung*, which served us as an organ up to the February Revolution. We kept in touch with the revolutionary section of the English Chartists through Julian Harney, the editor of the central organ of the movement, *The Northern Star*, to which I was a contributor. We entered likewise into a sort of cartel with the Brussels democrats (Marx was vice-president of the Democratic Society) and with the French Social-Democrats of the *Réforme*, which I furnished with news of the English

and German movements. In short, our connections with the radical and proletarian organizations and press organs were quite what one could wish.

Our relations with the League of the Just were as follows: The existence of the League was, of course, known to us; in 1843 Schapper had suggested that I join it, which I at that time naturally refused to do. However, we not only kept up our continuous correspondence with the Londoners, but remained on still closer terms with Dr. Ewerbeck, then the leader of the Paris communities. Without going into the League's internal affairs, we learnt of every important happening. On the other hand, we influenced the theoretical views of the most important members of the League by word of mouth, by letter and through the press. For this purpose we also made use of various lithographed circulars, which we dispatched to our friends and correspondents throughout the world on particular occasions, when it was a question of the internal affairs of the Communist Party in process of formation. In these, the League itself sometimes came to be dealt with. Thus, a young Westphalian student, Hermann Kriege, who went to America, came forward there as an emissary of the League and associated himself with the crazy Harro Harring for the purpose of using the League to turn South America upside down. He founded a paper in which, in the name of the League, he preached an extravagant communism of love dreaming, based on "love", and overflowing with love. Against this we let fly with a circular that did not fail of its effect. Kriege vanished from the League scene.

Later, Weitling came to Brussels. But he was no loner the naive young journeyman-tailor who, astonished at his own talents, was trying to clarify in his own mind just what a communist society would look like. He was now the great man, persecuted by the environs on account of his

superiority, who scented rivals, secret enemies and traps everywhere—the prophet, driven from country to country, who carried a recipe for the realization of heaven on earth ready-made in his pocket, and who was possessed with the idea that everybody intended to steal it from him. He had already fallen out with the members of the League in London; and in Brussels, where Marx and his wife welcomed him with almost superhuman forbearance, he also could not get along with anyone. So he soon afterwards went to America to try out his role of prophet there.

All these circumstance contributed to the quiet revolution that was taking place in the League, and especially among the leaders in London. The inadequacy of the previous conception of communism, both the simple French equalitarian communism and that of Weitling, became more and more clear to them. The tracing of communism back to primitive Christianity introduced by Weitling—no matter how brilliant certain passages to be found in his *Gospel of Poor Sinners*—had resulted in delivering the movement in Switzerland to a large extent into the hands, first of fools like Albrecht, and then of exploiting fake prophets like Kuhlmann. The “true socialism” dealt in by a few literary writers—a translation of French socialist phraseology into corrupt Hegelian German, and sentimental love dreaming (see the section on German of “True” Socialism in the *Communist Manifesto*)—that Kriege and the study of the corresponding literature introduced in the League was bound to disgust the old revolutionaries of the League, if only because of its slobbering feebleness. As against the untenability of the previous theoretical views, and as against the practical aberrations resulting therefrom, it was realized more and more in London that Marx and I were right in our new theory. This understanding was undoubtedly promoted by the fact that among the London leaders there were now two men who were considerably superior to those

previously mentioned in capacity for theoretical knowledge: the miniature painter Karl Pfänder from Heilbronn and the tailor Georg Eccarius from Thuringia.<sup>4</sup>

It suffices to say that in the spring of 1847 Moll visited Marx in Brussels and immediately afterwards me in Paris, and invited us repeatedly, in the name of his comrades, to join the League. He reported that they were as much convinced of the general correctness of our views as of the necessity of freeing the League from the old conspiratorial traditions and forms. Should we join, we would be given an opportunity of expounding our critical communism before a congress of the League in a manifesto, which would then be published as the manifesto of the League; we would likewise be able to contribute our quota towards the replacement of the obsolete League organization by one in keeping with the new times and aims.

We entertained no doubt that an organization within the German working class was necessary, if only for propaganda purposes, and that this organization, in so far as it would not be merely local in character, could only be a secret one, even outside Germany. Now, there already existed exactly such an organization in the shape of the League. What we previously objected to in this League was now relinquished as erroneous by the representatives of the League themselves; we were even invited to cooperate in the work of reorganization. Could we say no? Certainly not. Therefore, we entered the League; Marx founded a League community in Brussels from among our close friends, while I attended the three Paris communities.

In the summer of 1847, the first League congress took place in London, at which W. Wolff represented the Brussels and I the Paris communities. At this congress the reorganization of the League was carried through first of all. Whatever

remained of the old mystical names dating back to the conspiratorial period was now abolished; the League now consisted of communities, circles, leading circles, a Central Committee and a Congress, and henceforth called itself the “Communist League”.

“The aim of the League is the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the abolition of the old, bourgeois society based on class antagonisms and the foundation of a new society without classes and without private property”—thus ran the first article. The organization itself was thoroughly democratic, with elective and always removable boards. This alone barred all hankering after conspiracy, which requires dictatorship, and the League was converted—for ordinary peacetime at least—into a pure propaganda society. These new Rules were submitted to the communities for discussion—so democratic was the procedure now followed—then once again debated at the Second Congress and finally adopted by the latter on December 8, 1847. They are to be found reprinted in Wermuth and Stieber, Vol.I, p.239, Appendix X.

The Second Congress took place during the end of November and beginning of December of the same year. Marx also attended this time and expounded the new theory in a fairly long debate—the congress lasted at least ten days. All contradiction and doubt were finally set at rest, the new basic principles were unanimously adopted, and Marx and I were commissioned to draw up the Manifesto. This was done immediately afterwards. A few weeks before the February Revolution it was sent to London to be printed. Since then it has travelled round the world, has been translated into almost all languages and today still serves in numerous countries as a guide for the proletarian movement. In place of the old League motto, “All Men Are Brothers”, appeared the new battle cry, “Working Men of All



Countries, Unite!” which openly proclaimed the international character of the struggle. Seventeen years later this battle cry resounded throughout the world as the watchword of the International Working Men’s Association, and today the militant proletariat of all countries has inscribed it on its banner.

The February Revolution broke out. The London Central Committee functioning hitherto immediately transferred its powers to the Brussels leading circle. But this decision came at a time when an actual state of siege already existed in Brussels, and the Germans in particular could no longer assemble anywhere. We were all of us just on the point of going to Paris, and so the new Central Committee decided likewise to dissolve, to hand over all its powers to Marx and to empower him immediately to constitute a new Central Committee in Paris. Hardly had the five persons who adopted this decision (March 3, 1848) separated, before police forced their way into Marx’s house, arrested him and compelled him to leave for France the following day, which was just where he was wanting to go.

In Paris we all soon came together again. There the following document was drawn up and signed by all the members of the new Central Committee. It was distributed throughout Germany and many can still learn something from it even today:

### **Demands of the Communist Party in Germany<sup>5</sup>**

- 1) The whole of Germany shall be declared a single, indivisible republic.
- 3) Representatives of the people shall be paid so that workers also can sit in the parliament of the German people.

4) Universal arming of the people.

7) The estates of the princes and other feudal estates, all mines, pits, etc., shall be transformed into state property. On these estates, agriculture is to be conducted on a very large scale and with the most modern scientific means for the benefit of all society.

8) Mortgages on peasant holdings shall be declared state property; interest on such mortgages shall be paid by the peasants to the state.

9) In the districts where tenant farming is developed, land rent or farming dues shall be paid to the state as a tax.

11) All means of transport, railway, canals, steamships, roads, post, etc., shall be taken over by the state. They are to be converted into state property and put at the disposal of the non-possessing class free of charge.

14) Limitation of the right of inheritance.

15) Introduction of a steeply graded progressive taxation and abolition of taxes on consumer goods.

16) Establishment of national workshops. The state shall guarantee a living to all workers and provide for those unable to work.

17) Universal free elementary education.

It is in the interest of the German proletariat, of the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry, to work with all possible energy to put the above measures through. For only by their education can the millions in Germany, who up to now have been exploited by a small number of people and whom it will be attempted to keep in further subjection, get their rights

and the power that are their due as the producers of all wealth.

*The Committee: Karl Marx, Karl Schapper, H. Bauer, F. Engels, J. Moll, W. Wolff*

At that time the craze for revolutionary legions prevailed in Paris. Spaniards, Italians, Belgians, Dutch, Poles, and Germans flocked together in crowds to liberate their respective fatherlands. The German legion was led by Herwegh, Bornsted, Börnstein. Since immediately after the revolution all foreign workers not only lost their jobs but in addition were harassed by the public, the influx into these legions was very great. The new government saw in them a means of getting rid of foreign workers and granted them *l'etape du soldat*, that is, quarters along their line of march and a marching allowance of fifty centimes per day up to the frontier, whereafter the eloquent Lamartine, the Foreign Minister who was so readily moved to tears, quickly found an opportunity of betraying them to their respective governments.

We opposed this playing with revolution in the most decisive fashion. To carry an invasion, which was to import the revolution forcibly from outside, into the midst of the ferment then going on in Germany, meant to undermine the revolution in Germany itself, to strengthen the governments and to deliver the legionnaires—Lamartine guaranteed for that—defenseless into the hands of the German troops. When subsequently the revolution was victorious in Vienna and Berlin, the legion became all the more purposeless; but once begun, the game was continued.

We founded a German communist club, in which we advised the workers to keep away from the legion and to return instead to their homes singly and work there for the

movement. Our old friend Flocon, who had a seat in the Provisional Government, obtained for the workers sent by us the same travel facilities as had been granted to the legionnaires. In this way we returned three or four hundred workers to Germany, including the great majority of the League members.

As could easily be foreseen, the League proved to be much too weak a lever as against the popular mass movement that had now broken out. Three-quarters of the League members who had previously lived abroad had changed their domicile by returning to their homeland; their previous communities were thus to a great extent dissolved and they lost all contact with the League. One part, the more ambitious among them, did not even try to resume this contact, but each one began a small separate movement on his own account in his own locality. Finally, the conditions in each separate petty state, each province and each town were so different that the League would have been incapable of giving more than the most general directives; such directives were, however, much better disseminated through the press. In short, from the moment when the causes which had made the secret League necessary ceased to exist, the secret League as such ceased to mean anything. But this could least of all surprise the persons who had just stripped this same secret League of the last vestige of its conspiratorial character.

That, however, the League had been an excellent school for revolutionary activity was now demonstrated. On the Rhine, where *the Neue Rheinische Zeitung* provided a firm centre, in Nassau, in Rhenish Hesse, etc., everywhere members of the League stood at the head of the extreme democratic movement. The same was the case in Hamburg. In South Germany the predominance of petty-bourgeois democracy stood in the way. In Breslau, Wilhelm Wolff was active with

great success until the summer of 1848; in addition he received a Silesian mandate as an alternate representative in the Frankfurt parliament. Finally, the compositor Stephan Born, who had worked in Brussels and Paris as an active member of the League, founded a Workers' Brotherhood in Berlin which became fairly widespread and existed until 1850. Born, a very talented young man, who, however, was a bit too much in a hurry to become a political figure, "fraternized" with the most miscellaneous ragtag and bobtail in order to get a crowd together, and was not at all the man who could bring unity into the conflicting tendencies, light into the chaos. Consequently, in the official publications of the association the views represented in the *Communist Manifesto* were mingled hodge-podge with guild recollections and guild aspirations, fragments of Louis Blanc and Proudhon, protectionism, etc.; in short, they wanted to please everybody. In particular, strikes, trade unions and producers' co-operatives were set going and it was forgotten that above all it was a question of first conquering, by means of political victories, the field in which alone such things could be realized on a lasting basis. When, afterwards, the victories of the reaction made the leaders of the Brotherhood realize the necessity of taking a direct part in the revolutionary struggle, they were naturally left in the lurch by the confused mass which they had grouped around themselves. Born took part in the Dresden uprising in May, 1849 and had a lucky escape. But, in contrast to the great political movement of the proletariat, the Workers' Brotherhood proved to be a pure *Sonderbund* (tr.-separate league), which to a large extent existed only on paper and played such a subordinate role that the reaction did not find it necessary to suppress it until 1850, and its surviving branches until several years later. Born, whose real name was Buttermilch, has not become a big political figure but a petty Swiss professor, who no longer translates Marx into

guild language but the meek Renan into his own fulsome German.

With June 13, 1849, in Paris, the defeat of the May insurrections in Germany and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution by the Russians, a great period of the 1848 Revolution came to a close. But the victory of the reaction was as yet by no means final. A reorganization of the scattered revolutionary forces was required, and hence also of the League. The situation again forbade, as in 1848, any open organization of the proletariat; hence one had to organize again in secret.

In the autumn of 1849, most of the member of the previous central committees and congresses gathered again in London. The only ones still missing were Schapper, who was jailed in Wiesbaden but came after his acquittal, in the spring of 1850, and Moll, who, after he had accomplished a series of most dangerous missions and agitational journeys—in the end he recruited mounted gunners for the Palatinate artillery right in the midst of the Prussian army in the Rhine Province—joined the Besancon workers' company of Willich's corps and was killed by a shot in the head during the battle at the Murg in front of the Rotenfels Bridge. On the other hand, Willich now entered upon the scene. Willich was one of those sentimental Communists so common in Western Germany since 1845, who on that account alone was instinctively, furtively antagonistic to our critical tendency. More than that, he was entirely the prophet, convinced of his personal mission as the predestined liberator of the German proletariat and as such a direct claimant as much to political as to military dictatorship. Thus, to the primitive Christian communism previously preached by Weitling was added a kind of communist Islam. However, the propaganda of this new religion was for the

first time being restricted to the refugee barracks under Willich's command.

Hence, the League was organized afresh; the Address of March 1850 was issued and Heinrich Bauer sent as an emissary to Germany. The Address, composed by Marx and myself, is still of interest today, because petty-bourgeois democracy is even now the party which must certainly be the first to come to power in Germany as the savior of society from the communist workers on the occasion of the next European upheaval now soon due (the European revolutions, 1815, 1830, 1848-52, 1870, have occurred at intervals of fifteen to eighteen years in our century). Much of what is said there is, therefore, still applicable today. Heinrich Bauer's mission was crowned with complete success. The trusty little shoemaker was a born diplomat. He brought the former members of the League, who had partly become laggards and partly were acting on their own account, back into the active organization, and particularly also the then leaders of the Workers' Brotherhood. The League began to play the dominant role in the workers', peasants' and athletic associations to a far greater extent than before 1848, so that the next quarterly address to the communities, in June 1850, could already report that the student Schurz from Bonn (later on American ex-minister), who was touring Germany in the interest of petty-bourgeois democracy, "had found all fit forces already in the hands of the League". The League was undoubtedly the only revolutionary organization that had any significance in Germany.

But what purpose this organization should serve depended very substantially on whether the prospects of a renewed upsurge of the revolution were realized. And in the course of the year 1850 this became more and more improbable, indeed impossible. The industrial crisis of 1847, which had

paved the way for the Revolution of 1848, had been overcome; a new, unprecedented period of industrial prosperity had set in; whoever had eyes to see and used them must have clearly realized that the revolutionary storm of 1848 was gradually spending itself.

“With this general prosperity, in which the productive forces of bourgeois society develop as luxuriantly as is at all possible within bourgeois relationships, *there can be no talk of a real revolution*. Such a revolution is only possible in the periods when both these factors, the modern productive forces and the bourgeois productive forms, come in collision with each other. The various quarrels in which the representatives of the industrial factions of the Continental Party of Order<sup>6</sup> now indulge and mutually compromise themselves, far from providing the occasion for new revolutions are, on the contrary, possible only because the basis of the relationships is momentarily so secure and, what the reaction does not know, so *bourgeois*. From it all attempts of the reaction to hold up bourgeois development *will rebound just as certainly as all moral indignation and all enthusiastic proclamations of the democrats*”.

Thus Marx and I wrote in the “Revue of May to October 1850” in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Politisch-ökonomische Revue*, Nos.V and VI, Hamburg, 1850, p.153.

This cool estimation of the situation, however, was regarded as heresy among many persons, at a time when Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, Mazzini, Kossuth and, among the lesser German lights, Ruge, Kinkel, Goegg and the rest of them crowded in London to form provisional governments of the future not only for their respective fatherlands but for the whole of Europe, and when it only remained a matter of obtaining the requisite money from America as a loan for the revolution to realize at a moment’s notice the European revolution and



the various republics which went with it as a matter of course. Can anyone be surprised that a man like Willich was taken in by this, that Schapper, acting on his old revolutionary impulse, also allowed himself to be fooled, and that the majority of the London workers, to a large extent refugees themselves, followed them into the camp of the bourgeois-democratic artificers of revolution? Suffice it to say that the reserve maintained by us was not to the liking of these people; one was to enter into the game of making revolutions. We most decidedly refused to do so. A split ensued; more about this is to be read in the *Revelations*. Then came the arrest of Nothjung, followed by that of Haupt, in Hamburg. The latter turned traitor by divulging the names of the Cologne Central Committee and being slated as the chief witness in the trial; but his relatives had no desires to be thus disgraced and bundled him off to Rio de Janeiro, where he later established himself as a businessman and in recognition of his services was appointed first Prussian and then German Consul General. He is now again in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

For a better understanding of the *Revelations*, I give the list of the Cologne accused:

(1) P. G. Röser, cigarmaker; (2) Heinrich Bürgers, who later died a progressive deputy to the Landtag; (3) Peter Nothjung, tailor, who died a few years ago as a photographer in Breslau; (4) W. J. Reiff; (5) Dr. Hermann Becker, now chief burgomaster of Cologne and member of the Upper House; (6) Dr. Roland Daniels, physician, who died a few years after the trial as a result of tuberculosis contracted in prison; (7) Karl Otto, chemist; (8) Dr. Abraham Jacoby, now physician in New York; (9) Dr. I. J. Klein, now physician and town councillor in Cologne; (10) Ferdinand Freiligrath, who, however, was at that time already in London; (11) I. L. Ehrhard, clerk; (12) Friedrich Lessner, tailor, now in London.

After a public trial before a jury lasting from October 4 to November 12, 1852, the following were sentenced for attempted high treason: Röser, Bürgers and Nothjung to six, Reiff, Otto and Becker to five, and Lessner to three years' confinement in a fortress; Daniels, Klein, Jacoby and Ehrhard were acquitted.

With the Cologne trial the first period of the German communist workers' movement comes to an end. Immediately after the sentence we dissolved our League; a few months later the Willich-Schapper Sonderbund was also laid to eternal rest.

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A whole generation lies between then and now. At that time Germany was a country of handicraft and of domestic industry based on hand labor; now it is a big industrial country still undergoing continual industrial transformation. At that time one had to seek out one by one the workers who had an understanding of their position as workers and of their historic-economic antagonism to capital, because this antagonism itself was only just beginning to develop. Today the entire German proletariat has to be placed under exceptional laws, merely in order to slow down a little the process of its development to full consciousness of its position as an oppressed class. At that time the few persons whose minds had penetrated to the realization of the historical role of the proletariat had to forgather in secret, to assemble clandestinely in small communities of three to twenty persons. Today the German proletariat no longer needs any official organization, either public or secret. The simple self-evident interconnection of like-minded class comrades suffices, without any rules, boards, resolutions or other tangible forms, to shake the whole German Empire to its foundations. Bismarck is the arbiter of Europe beyond the

frontiers of Germany, but within them there grows daily more threatening the athletic figure of the German proletariat that Marx foresaw already in 1844, the giant for whom the cramped imperial edifice designed to fit the philistine is even now becoming too small and whose mighty stature and broad shoulders are growing until the moment comes when by merely rising from his seat he will shatter the whole structure of the imperial constitution into fragments. And still more. The international movement of the European and American proletariat has become so much strengthened that not merely its first narrow form—the secret League—but even its second, infinitely wider form—the open International Working Men’s Association—has become a fetter for it, and that the simple feeling of solidarity based on the understanding of the identity of class position suffices to create and to hold together one and the same great party of the proletariat among the workers of all countries and tongues. The doctrine which the League represented from 1847 to 1852, and which at that time could be treated by the wise philistines with a shrug of the shoulders as the hallucinations of utter madcaps, as the secret doctrine of a few scattered sectarians, has now innumerable adherents in all civilized countries of the world, among those condemned to the Siberian mines as much as among the gold diggers of California; and the founder of this doctrine, the most hated, most slandered man of his time, Karl Marx, was, when he died, the ever-sought-for and ever-willing counsellor of the proletariat of both the old and the new world.

## Notes

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1. This text first appeared in the book *Karl Marx, Enthüllungen über den Kommunisten-Prozess zu Köln*,

Hottingen-Zurich, 1885 and in the newspaper *Sozialdemokrat*, issues 46, 47, and 48 (November 12, 19, and 26 respectively). It has also served as an introduction to Karl Marx's pamphlet *Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne*.—Ed.↵

2. A current of egalitarian, utopian communism, founded by François Noel Babeuf.—Ed.↵
3. By equalitarian Communism I understand, as stated, only that Communism which bases itself exclusively or predominantly on the demand for equality—*Engels note*↵
4. Pfänder died about eight years ago in London. he was a man of peculiarly fine intelligence, witty, ironical and dialectical. Eccarius, as we know, was later for many years Secretary of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, in the General Council of which the following old League members were to be found, among others: Eccarius, Pfänder, Lessner, Lochner, Marx and myself. Eccarius subsequently devoted himself exclusively to the English trade union movement.—*Engels note*↵
5. The demands presented here are selections by Engels, hence the omissions.—Ed.↵
6. French monarchist alliance.↵
7. Schapper in London at the end of the sixties. Willich took part in the American Civil War with distinction; he became Brigadier-General and was shot in the chest during the battle of Murfreesboro (Tennessee) but recovered and died about ten years ago in America. Of the other persons mentioned above, I will only remark that Heinrich Bauer was lost track of in Australia, and

that Weitling and Ewerbeck died in America.—*Engels*  
*footnote* [↩](#)